

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1 1. A method of providing telephone response unit (TRU)-based services,
2 comprising:
3 receiving from a point-of-sale (POS) device a request at a host computer
4 system to activate TRU-based services, wherein the request comprises an identifier that
5 indicates the specific TRU-based services to be activated;
6 confirming the availability of the specific TRU-based services to be activated;
7 storing at the host computer system information that indicates the services are
8 activated; and
9 returning a message to the POS that indicates that the TRU-based services
10 have been activated.
- 1 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the TRU-based services comprise
2 Interactive Voice Response (IVR) services.
- 1 3. The method of claim 1, wherein the TRU-based services comprise
2 automated response unit (ARU) services.
- 1 4. The method of claim 1, wherein returning a message to the POS that
2 indicates that the TRU-based services have been activated occurs in real time with respect to
3 receiving the request from the POS.
- 1 5. The method of claim 4, wherein real time comprises within about 5
2 seconds.
- 1 6. The method of claim 1, further comprising,
2 receiving a request from a TRU to provide an activation status of specific
3 TRU-based services;
4 searching stored information for the activation status of the specific TRU-
5 based services; and
6 returning information that indicates the activation status of the specific TRU-
7 based services.
- 1 7. The method of claim 6, further comprising, maintaining a record
2 reflective of an account balance of a customer relating to the specific TRU-based services.

1 8. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier that indicates the specific
2 TRU-based services to be activated is unique, as to the TRU-based services, to a particular
3 customer.

1 9. The method of claim 1, wherein returning a message to the POS device
2 that indicates that the TRU-based services have been activated comprises returning an
3 identifier that is unique to a particular customer.

1 10. The method of claim 1, wherein receiving the request from the POS
2 device to activate TRU-based services further comprises payment information relating to the
3 TRU-based services.

1 11. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier that indicates the specific
2 TRU-based services to be activated comprises a SKU# that relates generally to the TRU-
3 based services to be activated.

1 12. The method of claim 1, wherein the TRU-based services are selected
2 from the group consisting of voice messaging, horoscopes, wagering, general advice,
3 correspondence classes, and books on tape via cell phone.

1 13. A method of activating telephone response unit (TRU)-based services,
2 comprising:
3 entering information into a point-of-sale (POS) device, wherein the
4 information comprises an identifier of TRU-based services to be activated, and wherein the
5 TRU-based services comprise prerecorded information;
6 transmitting from the POS device a message to a host computer system,
7 wherein the message comprises a request to activate the TRU-based services;
8 receiving a message from the host computer system that the TRU-based
9 services are active.

1 14. The method of claim 13, wherein receiving a message from the host
2 computer system that the TRU-based services are active occurs in real time with respect to
3 transmitting from the POS device the message to the host computer system.

1 15. The method of claim 13, wherein entering information into the POS
2 comprises using a reader associated with the POS to read information from a TRU-based
3 services access card.

1 16. The method of claim 15, wherein the card comprises a selection from
2 the group consisting of a card with a magnetic stripe, a radio frequency identification card, a
3 smart card, a stored value card, a smart chip card, and a bar-coded card.

1 17. A method of providing telephone response unit (TRU)-based services,
2 comprising:
3 at a TRU, receiving a request from a customer to access TRU-based services;
4 transmitting from the TRU to a host computer system a request to provide an
5 activation status of TRU-based services relating to the customer;
6 receiving a response from the host computer system; and
7 using the response to determine whether to allow the customer to access the
8 TRU-based services.

1 18. A method of providing interactive voice response (IVR) services,
2 comprising:
3 receiving an IVR access number from an IVR access card via a reader
4 associated with a point of-sale (POS) device;
5 sending the IVR access number to a host computer system for validation;
6 at the host computer system, validating the IVR access number by:
7 searching for an activation status of the IVR access number; and
8 in real time, activating the IVR access number by storing information
9 that indicates that the number is active;
10 receiving at the host computer system from an IVR system a request to
11 confirm the activation status of the IVR access number;
12 searching for stored information relating to the activation status of the access
13 number;
14 returning from the host computer system to the IVR system information that
15 relates to the activation status of the IVR access number; and
16 maintaining an account balance relating to the IVR services.

1 19. A system for providing telephone response unit (TRU)-based services,
2 comprising:
3 a point-of-sale (POS) device configured to receive a TRU-based services
4 access number and transmit a request to activate the TRU-based services access number to a
5 host computer system; and
6 the host computer system, wherein the host computer system is programmed
7 to:
8 validate the TRU-based services access number by:
9 searching for an activation status of the TRU-based services
10 access number; and
11 activating the TRU-based services access number by storing
12 information that indicates that the number is active;
13 receive from a TRU a request to confirm the activation status of the
14 TRU-based services access number;
15 search for stored information relating to the activation status of the
16 access number;
17 return to the TRU information that relates to the activation status of the
18 TRU-based services access number; and
19 maintain a record reflective of an account balance of the customer.